

President Obama has announced his intention to send 30,000 more American combat personnel into Afghanistan, bringing the total number of U.S. troops there to 100,000 by next summer. During his speech, the President failed to set out concrete goals and a firm exit strategy. I cannot support this escalation without those guarantees. I am extremely concerned that Afghanistan will rapidly become one more military quagmire that sacrifices American lives and drains our funds.

I appreciate the difficult situation that President Obama finds himself in. The previous Administration handed him - in addition to a collapsing economy and exploding debt – two ongoing occupations that have already left thousands of Americans dead, and destabilized an entire region of the world. His decision was certainly not made any easier by having General McChrystal's recommendation leaked to the public. However, as much as I sympathize, the decision to escalate in Afghanistan, with benchmarks for success that are far in the future and not well-defined, will only make the situation worse.

When we invaded Afghanistan it was with a very clear goal: remove Al Qaeda and their base of support. Eight years later, Al Qaeda has been reduced to only 100 of its fighters doing battle in a country of 28 million people. Our military has done its job admirably and it is unlikely that military force can make further progress in that region.

We are interjecting ourselves into a multi-sided civil war between local powers intent on taking control of the region. The ostensibly legitimate government has little control over the country and is plagued by corruption. That corruption extends to the poppy farmers who drive Afghanistan's opium trade and fund the Taliban. The Karzai government has firm control over only a fraction of the thirty-four provinces in Afghanistan, and our troops will be going into the regions that have the most support for the Taliban.

At the same time we are propping up the Karzai government we face an insurgency whose recruitment is driven by our own bombs. According to the field manual written by General Petraeus, there need to be 20-25 troops for every 1,000 residents in a country. A successful counterinsurgency in Afghanistan would require hundreds of thousands of troops, 600,000 to be exact, more than our nation could ever safely deploy at one time. Even if we had the resources, the collateral damage from such an escalation would fuel recruitment for the international groups we are trying to defeat, even more so than our continued presence has already enflamed those groups.

After nearly a decade of occupying two countries, our military is overstretched and overburdened. In the eight years we have been in Afghanistan and the six and a half years we have been in Iraq, 5,220 of our troops have been killed, and 36,000 have been wounded in action. Far too many members of our armed forces are enduring multiple deployments and inadequate dwell time, and approximately 12,000 troops have had their tour extended involuntarily through stop loss.

With 170,000 troops still in Iraq, an increase in troop levels in Afghanistan will mean the current condition of our military will continue for years, significantly reducing our ability to respond to threats and natural disasters.

Beyond the strategic problems and the tragic loss of life, there is the staggering cost. Our occupation of Afghanistan is already costing \$3.6 billion a month, over \$40 billion per year. This escalation will cost another \$30 billion per year. In a time when we are struggling to provide basic social services in our own country, we cannot continue to fund this operation.

When asked why he received multiple deferments from Vietnam, Dick Cheney said that he had "other priorities." While few Americans are so cavalier as him, only a small part of America is making the sacrifices this occupation demands. It is this small group who live with the constant fear that their friends and family will come home injured, or not come home at all.

It is shameful that those who are not risking their lives or their families are not even asked to help pay for the occupation. During World War II, the top tax bracket was taxed at 94 percent, now it is 35 percent. Yet even a small surtax to help share only the financial burden of this quagmire is considered unacceptable.

This war is depriving our nation of its future; both its children and its investments are being sacrificed in a hopeless cause without clearly defined and achievable goals. When Matthew Hoh notably resigned from the State Department in September, he wrote, "I fail to see the value or the worth in continued U.S. casualties or expenditures of resources in support of the Afghan government in what is, truly, a 35-year old civil war." I could not agree more; it is time to leave.